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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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I wonder how CNN felt when they were told that a 15-year old boy was responsible for the recent shutdown of it CNN.com site! And then to learn that this kid wasn't a "great" hacker! You would think that businesses and organizations such as CNN, with significant financial resources, would utilize some of their money to prevent such attacks on their web sites. It's simply amazing. In fact, it's downright laughable! Not that I think that these types of malicious attacks on the internet should be condoned, but why is it that they continue to occur so easily?

Just look at some of the sites that have been sabotaged lately. Even federal government sites are susceptible to successful attacks. With today's technology and programming skills, you'd think such web vandalism would be rare. Unbelievable!

Hey, what happened to Spring? C'mon now, I was ready a few weeks ago! The last couple of weekends, I managed to get my lawn cleaned up quite a bit. I even had all of the leaves and water cleared from my pool cover. Naturally, right after that we had a cold, rainy and windy couple of days and everything's a mess again. So much for getting an early jump on my outdoor spring cleaning!

Everyone get their tax returns in on time? It was nice that we had a couple of extra days this year (I didn't need them). And in Massachusetts, we had yet another additional day due to the Patriot's Day holiday. Since we bought the house a couple of years ago, I've had our taxes done professionally. My father happened to get a free (due to some rebate) copy of TurboTax and sent it to me last year. I used it to get an idea of how to do my taxes with all of the household segments included; and to compare my results with the tax preparer's version. After printing out my version, I realized that this guy was just using TurboTax himself. Why pay almost a hundred dollars to have him plug figures into a program when I can do that just as easily? Needless to say, I upgraded the program this year and did both the federal and state taxes myself, and saved some money. I did procrastinate and kept doubting my figures, but I finally sent my returns in in early March (late for me). Still waiting for my federal refund check!

Until next time...

Phil Katz Dies Unexpectedly

Phillip W. Katz, age 37, passed away unexpectedly on Friday, April 14, 2000.

Beloved son of Hildegard and beloved brother of Cynthia. Also survived by other relatives and friends.

Phil was a graduate of UWM Computer Science Engineering Program. He was the author of the PKZIP/PKUNZIP software and owner of PKWARE Inc. Co.

Private services have been held. Memorials to the charity of your choice would be appreciated.

8 New Issues at Digital Antic Project

We've added eight issues to the Digital Antic Project -- the full text of 62 Antic issues are now online.

November 1985 - Vol. 4 No. 7 - New Communications
March 1987 - Vol. 5 No. 11 - Inside Today's Atari Corp.
November 1987 - Vol. 6 No. 7 - The Winners
June 1988 - Vol. 7 No. 2 - Power Up!
July 1989 - Vol. 8 No. 3 - Atari Glyphics
October 1988 - Vol. 7 No. 6 - Atari Grand Slam
August 1989 - Vol. 8 No. 4 - Mapping the Atari Returns
September 1989 - Vol. 8 No. 5 - Joystick Test Lab

In addition, there's a new section, "Where Are They Now?" Find out what happened to your favorite Antic writers/editors/programmers.

http://www.atarimagazines.com

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
jmirando@portone.com

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. It's going to be another short column this week. Perhaps with Easter and Passover people have been too busy to post much on the UseNet. I hope that's all it is. I'd hate to see something as valuable to users as the Atari NewsGroups just fade away. The thing that amazes me the most about the Atari NewsGroups is that once in a while there are actually NEW Atari users posting. They've either purchased, been given, or dusted off an Atari and want to know what they can actually do with it. They're usually amazed at what you can do with these machines. Sure, they're not fast, they don't have millions of colors, and they don't have a huge pool of memory. But they are capable machines that can do almost anything that their modern cousins can do. Add to the mix the fact that they have a genuine personality, and you're apt to forget all about the limitations that it does have.

On the SETI@home front, we're coming up on sixteen years of CPU time donated to the search for extraterrestrial intelligence. I think it's a cause well worth donating spare computer time to, although I wish there was a way to do a more thorough search for intelligence on THIS planet. <grin>

Feel free to check out the Team Atari stats at http://setiathome.ssl.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/cgi?cmd=team_lookup&name=team+atari and join up if you've got a PC or a Mac with some time to kill. You can

get more info about SETI@home in general at
http://setiathome.ssl.berkeley.edu

I guess the big news for us this week is the Hasbro lawsuit. Hasbro put their collective foot down to protect the Atari patents they bought. What strikes me as amusing (or sad, depending on my mood) is that they have probably spent almost as much on the lawsuit as they did to purchase the rights in the first place. I guess that five million dollars just doesn't go as far as it used to. <grin>

If you're interested in the lawsuit and its implications, I recommend reading about it here:
http://www.imgmagazine.com/news/archive/00/04/04_19_00.shtml

It's a Mac magazine, but don't let that fool you. They're an okay publication. The only thing that bothers me is that nowhere do they mention Atari.

Well, let's get to the UseNet stuff...

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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Alyre Chiasson asks about formatting HD floppies on a TT:

"I was given what was probably one of the first TTs made. It came with a 40MEG hard drive and a 720K floppy drive. I've upgraded the hard drive to 120MEG and put in a 1.4 MEG floppy drive and flipped dip switch 7. It reads 1.4 floppies just fine and I see the HD format option under TOS. However, I cannot select the HD option. I suspect I have TOS 3.0 and maybe it doesn't support HD formatting? The other thing I found strange is no Atari logo comes up or memory check when the machine boots like my Mega Ste. Also I thought it was bad in general to bend especially SCSI cables, looked like an accordion in the TT I got."

G. Swaine tells Alyre:

"You probably have TOS 3.01. HD formatting only arrived with TOS 3.05

The logo and mem check only show up in MegaSTE TOS (2.06), TOS 3.06 and TOS 4.x.

(I own and program a TT with 3.05)"

Andrew Harvey asks for info on multi-platform hard drives:

"I've recently got a PC (shame!) with a SCSI card and can attach my ZIP drive. Is there any possible way that I can access Zip disks formatted for Atari use (with HD driver) on the PC? It would save a lot of time and trouble if it were!"

Edward Baiz tells Andrew:

"I would think it would be possible depending on the options you chose when you formatted it under HDDriver. There is an option for DOS compatibility I believe."

Steve Hammond tells Edward:

"HDDriver will allow the atari to read a PC formatted Zip disk. I have never had any luck getting a PC to read one that I formatted on my TT with PC compatibility enabled. On the other hand, I have no problem reading and writing to ones that I formatted on my PC (at home or at work)."

Dr. Uwe Seimet, the author of HD Driver, tells Steve:

"This is strange. I do this all the time, and I know a lot of users doing the same with Windows98/NT or Linux. Most likely you didn't specify the correct BIOS parameters for your controller when partitioning the disk. Please also refer to the HDDRIVER manual."

Hallvard Tangeraas asks about which boot selector people prefer:

"I'm planning on adding a downloadable boot-selector on my Notator/Creator SL "software" page (http://also.as/hall/) as I personally find this very useful, switching between a normal MagiC/Thing setup and my very picky/limited Notator SL setup.

I use "Superboot" for this, which works OK, but seems a little old now. I've got others, but they're either in German or too hard to figure out without extensive reading in user manuals (not very applicable for musicians who just want to get on with things).

Any other freeware/shareware boot selectors which can be recommended?"

Lonny Pursell tell Hallvard:

"You can try Mouse Boot. Available on my site (http://www.bright.net/~atari/). The author has left the scene but he granted me permission to release the registered version. I've been using it for many years quite reliably."

Well folks, that's it for this week. See? I told you it was going to be short.

I'll be back again next week, same time, same station. Just like always. 'Till then keep your ears open so that you'll be able to hear what they're saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Japan Controls PSX2 Exports!
  """""""""""""""""""""""""""""""   Hasbro Wins Patent Lawsuit!
                                    New PSX Games for $9.99!
                                    Everquest! Nintendo Most Used!
                                    And much more!

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Japan Slaps Export Controls on Playstation2

Japan has slapped export controls on Sony Corp.'s new, hugely popular Playstation2 video game because the machine is so sophisticated it could be used for military purposes, media said Sunday.

The hit home game machine, which includes a digital video disc (DVD) player and will eventually offer Internet access, is Sony's most profitable product. The company said it had shipped 1.4 million in the month after the game's March 4 launch.

The console and its eight-megabyte memory card have been designated as ''general-purpose products related to conventional weapons" because they contain components that could be used for military devices such as missile guidance systems, Kyodo news agency quoted industry sources as saying.

Playstation2 is the first game console to face export controls under the Foreign Exchange and Foreign Trade Control Law, Kyodo said.

The law requires the trade ministry's approval for the export of restricted products worth more than 50,000 yen ($472). Thus, the export of more than two consoles would be controlled because each is priced at 39,800 yen.

''We have mixed feelings because our efforts to produce a game console of the highest quality have resulted in legal restrictions," the Asahi Shimbun newspaper quoted an official of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc as saying.

''We could not compromise because of the fierce competition in the industry," he said.

Officials of the trade ministry and Sony could not be reached for further comment.

With U.S. software giant Microsoft Corp due to enter the lucrative video game market later next year with its own high-performance console, tentatively called the ''X-Box," export controls could hinder Sony's ability to compete, Kyodo quoted industry sources as saying.

The first version of the Playstation generated approximately 40 percent of Sony's group-based operating profits.

Sony Computer Entertainment Inc, a Sony Corp subsidiary, has said it aims to ship four million PlayStation2 consoles in Japan and three million each in Europe and the United States in 2000/01. Overseas shipments are due to start later this year.

''These days there are so many items that have technology for civilians that can also be used for military purposes, and of course, PlayStation2 is among these goods," the Asahi Shimbun newspaper quoted military

commentator Kensuke Ebata as saying.

Military analysts cited the example of a Tomahawk missile that needs to ‘‘see" where it is going until it strikes its target and must process graphic material at high speed to keep to its target. PlayStation2’s graphic processing capability is fast enough to enable it to be used in a missile.

Japan’s government has become increasingly wary of the possibility that products meant for civilian use could be diverted for weapons use.

Japanese radar and communications devices for civilian use were discovered in a North Korean submarine sunk by the South Korean military in December 1998, and two Japanese men were arrested in January on suspicion of illegally shipping parts for anti-tank rocket launchers to Iran.

The export restrictions are just the latest in a string of problems that have plagued Sony’s most profitable product.

Sony Computer Entertainment said this month that users could illegally manipulate the machine to copy DVD movies to videotape. Last month it said it had found the game player could be used to watch digital video disk software sold overseas in breach of a worldwide agreement among DVD player makers.

Nintendo Most Used Video Gaming System

In the hotly contested video game market, Nintendo still reigns supreme over other popular video game systems, a new Zogby America survey reveals.

The April survey of 1,244 adults nationwide showed that 21% of those surveyed owned Nintendo or NES gaming system, with SONY Playstation next at 15.2% followed by Sega’s Saturn or Dreamcast system at 10.8%.

Among certain subgroups, the rankings were less than certain. For example, SONY Playstation was the most popular choice among those with high school diplomas with Nintendo second and Sega at third. Among Asian Americans SONY also was number one over Nintendo, while among blacks, the issue was a virtual toss-up between Nintendo and SONY Playstation).

Overall, 60.9% of the respondents said they also used personal computers as a gaming system, the survey showed. What we asked:

What kind of gaming system do you own?

Hasbro Settles Game Copyright Suit With 2 Firms

Hasbro Inc.’s video game unit Hasbro Interactive said on Wednesday it settled a lawsuit with two companies that were accused of violating its copyright on such popular video games as "Pac-Man," "Centipede" and "Tetris," for an undisclosed sum.

The two companies, GT Interactive and Varcon Systems, agreed to stop selling look-alike games of titles owned or licensed by Hasbro. GT

Interactive and Varcon, for example, sold games like "Mac-Man" and "Munch Man," which Hasbro said infringed on its copyright of "Pac-Man."

Hasbro said it would continue to pursue its suit against eGames Inc. and smaller companies Webfoot, MVP Software and Xtreme Games.

In 1998, Hasbro acquired the rights to many games created by Atari, including several that were the subject of the suit.

‘‘When you look at our games and their games side by side, there’s no doubt that the defendants have copied the creative expression of the Atari games, not just abstract ideas," said Hasbro Interactive’s president Tom Dusenberry, in a statement.

Hasbro Victorious In Lawsuit

Back in early February we brought you news of a lawsuit filed by Hasbro Interactive on behalf of their subsidiary Atari Interactive, which sought to protect what Hasbro considered its intellectual property - namely, games similar to the classic titles Pac Man, Missile Command and Asteroids. Several Mac games were cited in the lawsuit, as well as several publishers that produce Mac OS titles.

Now, in a move that is sure to send a chill up the spine of every programmer who has ever hacked together a shareware Tetris clone, both GT Interactive and Varcon Systems, publishers of many of the games named in this lawsuit, have reached an out-of-court settlement rather than battle Hasbro over the matter. Not only will they pay damages to Hasbro, they will cease selling the products in question (which were for the most part "game packs" of bargain-priced titles). The result is that Hasbro’s right to control these intellectual properties - which have been copied, imitated, modified and expanded throughout the history of video game development - has now been established. The implications of this are not clear, but you can be sure that anyone with a game in development that seems even vaguely similar to classic Atari titles is choking on that breakfast burrito right about now. Here are excerpts from Hasbro’s announcement:

> Hasbro Interactive has reached a settlement with two defendants in an intellectual property suit involving several of its games.
>
> Acknowledging Hasbro Interactive’s rights to games such as CENTIPEDE, MISSILE COMMAND, PAC-MAN and TETRIS, GT Interactive and Varcon Systems have agreed to cease sales of titles based on these and other properties Hasbro Interactive owns or licenses.
>
> "Creativity and innovation form the cornerstone of the interactive entertainment industry, making the protection of intellectual property critical to the success of all publishers and developers," commented Hasbro Interactive President Tom Dusenberry. "Hasbro has a long history of building great game brands. This suit is aimed at ensuring we can continue to deliver the high-quality, high-value games that consumers have come to expect from Hasbro Interactive. If we succeed, our development and licensing partners succeed and, ultimately, the game consumer wins."
>
> Hasbro Interactive is continuing to pursue the suit against eGames,

Webfoot, MVP Software, and Xtreme Games. "We hope that these companies will begin to turn their attention to creating new games, rather than trying to emulate games owned and already being developed by others," Dusenberry added. "When you look at our games and their games side by side, there's no doubt that the defendants have copied the creative expression of the Atari games, not just abstract ideas." Under the terms of the settlement, GT Interactive will cease the sales of "Mac-Man," "Munch Man," "Munch Man II," "Macman Deluxe," "Patriot Command," "Bricklayer," "Tetri-Madness," "Chomper," and "Missile Defender," among others... The settlement also requires GT Interactive to pay an undisclosed amount of money to Hasbro Interactive.

Varcon Systems has agreed to stop selling its titles named in the suit, including: "Patriot Command," "Hemiroids," "Bricklayer," "Mac-Man," and "Munch-Man."

Hasbro Interactive acquired the rights to many Atari properties for the home consumer market in 1998. Since then, Hasbro Interactive has released new, 3D interactive versions of CENTIPEDE and MISSILE COMMAND, as well as a compilation of the original, 2D games, ATARI ARCADE HITS. Atari Interactive is a subsidiary of Hasbro Interactive, Inc.

It is unlikely that Hasbro will add more names to this lawsuit at this stage, so authors of the hundreds of Tetris, Asteroids and Pac-Man clones out there as shareware and freeware can most likely rest easy. However, many consider these "foundation" titles of the gaming industry to be the actual bedrock upon which modern games are built - without such imitation and extrapolation from the originals, would we have the titles we have today? GT Interactive's admission that their titles were "based" on these classics and payment of damages as a result sets the stage for future courtroom battles. How do you feel about this issue - Does Hasbro/Atari "own" the concepts and designs behind these classic titles, or did GT Interactive just cave in prematurely? How do you think this will affect the way video games are developed? Or do you just feel that these are old, stale games and the industry has moved on since then?

Take-Two Interactive Takes Leadership Position in Bringing New PlayStation Game Console Titles to Retail Shelves At an Aggressive $9.99 Price Point

Take-Two Interactive Software Inc. is pleased to announce that it will be debuting and releasing new titles for PlayStation game console at retail at the recommended price point of $9.99 starting April 25th.

''Take-Two Interactive is proud to take a leadership role in releasing new PlayStation titles at the $9.99 price point as it puts everyone, both consumer and publisher, in a win-win situation," said Ryan Brant, Chief Executive Officer of Take-Two. ''As this industry rapidly changes and continues to develop cutting-edge interactive entertainment, we are pledging to help ease consumers through this phase of technological revolution by releasing a quality and diverse library of PlayStation software at aggressive price points throughout 2000."

The Take-Two Interactive budget lineup is as follows:

* Spec Ops: Stealth Patrol - Military Action Game developed by Runecraft and set for release on PlayStation this April lets you take control of the US Army Rangers, one of the toughest and most elite of the world’s military task forces. Your main objective is to eliminate opponent targets in through stealth or all out war while completing various action-packed missions. ESRB Rating: T for Teen.
* Grudge Warriors - Action-packed 3D Vehicular Shooter developed by Tempest Software set for release on PlayStation this April. There is an organized tournament that takes place between the world’s most powerful gangs known as ‘The Death Ring’. The aim of the game is to destroy the defense network of gang opponents in order to progress to the next match. After successfully eliminating all opponents, you will engage the final ‘‘Crime Lord" in battle to determine the fate of the world. ESRB Rating: T for Teen.
* Martian Gothic - 3D Adventure / Horror Game set for release on PlayStation this May and developed by Creative Reality follows the nightmare uncovered by three investigators sent by a cynical Earth Control as they assess the potentially disastrous situation on Vita 1 - a base set up on Mars to search for evidence of bacterial life beneath the frozen surface. ESRB Rating: Rating Pending.
* Darkstone - Critically-Acclaimed PC Role Playing Game comes to the PlayStation in July and takes you to a fantastic medieval world in the pure Heroic Fantasy tradition where you must defeat Draak, the mystical and powerful dragon that has initiated a reign of terror upon the kingdom. The only way to defeat your nemesis is to invoke the power of the orb. If not, all hope may be lost forever. ESRB Rating: T for Teen.

Put the Pedal to the Metal and Do Whatever It Takes to Win in Speed Punks

Sony Computer Entertainment America announced the nationwide release of Speed Punks, available exclusively for the PlayStationfi game console. Featuring smooth, fast gameplay combined with upbeat, animated humor and colorful environments, Speed Punks offers the ultimate cart racing experience with attitude.

Developed by Funcom, Speed Punks introduces six feisty characters, each with their own distinct personalities and custom-built carts. By utilizing various projectiles and power-ups and mastering the unique shortcuts on more than 24 thrilling tracks, these tarmac-tearing delinquents will do whatever it takes to win.

‘‘Speed Punks offers a clever mix of intense gameplay, good humor and irreverent fun, providing pure enjoyment for players of all ages," said Ami Blaire, director, product marketing, Sony Computer Entertainment America. ‘‘Not only is Speed Punks one of the best cart racing games available, but it is one of the best family-friendly titles available for PlayStation."

Players can select their favorite character and compete in multi-player modes for up to four players, using a Multi Tap adaptor. With projectiles and power-ups including homing missiles, bombs, remote bombs, slime, shockwave, maximum speed boost, tire pop, machine guns, speed boost tokens and more, Speed Punks encourages players to cheat their way to the finish line.

With their bratty attitudes and lead feet, these maniac Speed Punks racers will always take the low road to victory:

-- Montgomery "Monty" Carlo -- What Monty doesn't know about racing isn't worth knowing. He's determined to be in pole position all the way, and he is the most dedicated of the group.
-- Tabitha -- The youngest of the characters, she's a spoiled little madam who thinks the best way to get your own way is to throw a tantrum bigger and louder than ever before.
-- Buster & Wedgie -- Buster looks like a complete thug, and he's been held back in school so many times that he's older than some of the teachers. He takes his role of "school bully" very seriously. A natural coward, Wedgie is Buster's sidekick and loves to help him pick on the other kids.
-- Monica -- Monica has a strange effect on boys: as soon as she drives by, they lose control and become babbling idiots.
-- Brains -- Brains is a scientific genius who loves computers and chemistry sets. He is currently working on a robot racer that he plans to use to help him test his driving skills.
-- Tempest -- Tempest is a manic, over-excitable problem child -- a pyromaniac, kleptomaniac and natural rebel. He's the one that encourages all the others to ditch school to go racing.

The independent Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) rates Speed Punks ''E" for ''Everyone." For more information about the ESRB visit www.esrb.org.

Breakthrough Property Continues to Raise Standard for Online Play With April 24 Release of Everquest: The Ruins of Kunark

Sony Computer Entertainment America announced the upcoming April 24, 2000 release of EverQuest: The Ruins of Kunark, an expansion of EverQuest, the most successful online role-playing game ever developed. Building on the success of the popular original, EverQuest: The Ruins of Kunark will offer more than 210,000 current EverQuest enthusiasts an all-new continent to roam, more than 25 new adventure zones to explore, an additional playable race and an enhanced 3D engine. EverQuest: The Ruins of Kunark will be available for purchase through retail outlets nationwide and via The Station@sony.com.

''We are proud of the consumer success and growth that we have experienced with EverQuest in 1999," said John Smedley, president and CEO, Verant Interactive, the development studio responsible for its creation. ''With users expecting a continuation of EverQuest's dynamic online world, and as demand for this franchise continues to evolve, the new expansion pack will allow players to exceed the previous character level limit and provides 33 percent more gameplay."

As the premier online role-playing experience, EverQuest allows players to build and progress their characters, form alliances, gather magical artifacts and battle monsters in exciting quests to conquer the world of Norrath. EverQuest: The Ruins of Kunark takes players on a mystical quest to the continent of Kunark, home of the Iksar race. On the continent, players face all-new challenges and rewards in their quest for dominance and survival.

To obtain the expansion pack, gamers that are new to EverQuest will be able to purchase a version that includes the original EverQuest along with the expansion pack for $39.95 suggested retail price (SRP). Existing EverQuest fans may purchase the add-on directly online from The Station@sony.com for $16.95 plus shipping and handling. EverQuest fans can get more information on EverQuest: The Ruins of Kunark by visiting the exclusive Web site at www.everquest.com/kunark.

EverQuest: The Ruins of Kunark key features include:

-- New continent, Kunark, located south of Faydwer
-- More than 25 new beginner, mid-level and advanced zones including lakes, jungles, caves, dungeons, ancient towers and underground castles
-- New playable race, the Iksar (Lizardman)
-- A new cast of visually stunning non-playable characters including wyrms and wyverns, reptilian monsters, giant scorpions, man-eating plants and more
-- A highly-detailed world with larger textures and three times the number of polygons than the original EverQuest
-- Newly created cover and box art by the renowned fantasy artist Keith Parkinson
-- Increased level difficulty range that allows players to advance further in the game

The Station@sony.com is the official provider of EverQuest, with software updates and news about the game, message boards and other community features, as well as an easy-to-use billing system for EverQuest's monthly subscription fee of $9.89. For more information, please visit http://www.station.sony.com.

Infogrames North America, Inc. Takes to the Galaxy With Independence War 2: The Edge of Chaos for PC and Sega Dreamcast

The popular Independence War franchise returns with a second exhilarating space adventure -- Independence War 2: The Edge of Chaos. Infogrames North America, Inc. announced the making of the sequel for the PC, and for the first time the series will appear on a console platform, the Sega Dreamcast.

''Fans of the original and new comers alike will be enthralled by Independence War 2: The Edge of Chaos," said David Riley, director of marketing for Infogrames North America, Inc.'s Action/Strategy Label. ''With a brilliant 3D atmosphere, multi-player action and lifelike space craft physics, The Edge of Chaos is taking the space sim genre to the next level. And, having the ability to bring it to console fans is that much more exciting!"

As in the original, The Edge of Chaos will continue to focus on the logistics and physics of a space simulator while incorporating an action/adventure element with an engaging storyline and dynamic characters. New to the series is an extraordinary 3D graphics engine and new technology that offers many new features for the PC including:

* Free form universe lets players roam 16 star systems, interacting with dynamically generated space traffic
* Ability to tailor your ship and weapons payload through piracy and trading

* User-friendly interface means no more keyboard overlays required
* Engineering panel allows players to effect repairs and monitor and customize their ship’s energy resources
* A variety of realistically modeled starships to pilot
* Online multi-play for the PC with Death Match and Team Missions

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A-ONE’s Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Canada Arrests 15-Year-Old Old ’Mafiaboy’ Hacker

A 15-year-old hacker, known online as "Mafiaboy", was charged by Canadian police on Wednesday with mischief in one of the biggest cyber attacks in history.

The charges relate to the jamming of the CNN.com Web site and up to 1,200 CNN-hosted sites for four hours on February 8.

Mafiaboy, who cannot be named under a Canadian law that protects the identities of juveniles charged with crimes, was arrested on Saturday and formally charged on Monday, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police told a news conference.

Police Inspector Yves Roussel said investigators were able to track the 15-year-old boy in part because he bragged about his alleged exploit in messages sent to Internet chat rooms.

‘‘This individual, using the nickname Mafiaboy, would have publicized on many occasions that he was the person responsible for those attacks," Roussel said.

‘‘The prosecution intends to demonstrate before the court that Mafiaboy is responsible for the denial-of-service attack that was launched for more than four hours on the 8th of February against the CNN site and all the sites that are hosted by this company -- and we’re talking roughly 1,200 of those," Roussel said.

The Mounties charged Mafiaboy with two counts of mischief to data, which carries a maximum sentence for juveniles up to two years in detention and a C$1,000 ($675) fine.

Mafiaboy has been released but his bail conditions include not using a computer except for academic purposes and under the supervision of a teacher.

He is also prohibited from connecting to the Internet or frequenting stores that sell computers or computer paraphernalia. Police seized all of the computers and related material found at the boy’s home.

Police said the investigation into the series of cyber attacks that locked

up some of the Internet’s most popular Web sites in February continues and there could be other arrests.

The ‘‘denial-of-service" attacks in early February shut down such Web sites as Yahoo!, Amazon.com, eBay, BUY.COM, Excite and E-Trade. Mafiaboy was not charged in connection with the attacks against the sites.

The February attacks alarmed Internet users across the globe, cost Web sites millions of dollars in revenue and shook the electronic commerce industry because of the apparent ease with which major sites were made inaccessible.

The Mounties and FBI declined to say whether they had identified other suspects in the wider investigation involving those sites.

‘‘We had to do something to prevent further actions from Mafiaboy. That’s why we arrested him last weekend," Roussel said.

‘‘However, the investigation is ongoing and there is literally tons of information to scrutinize. There is a possibility that other people might be arrested," he added.

Police would not comment on whether Mafiaboy acted alone in the Web assault on CNN’s site or was part of a group. They also would not divulge how many computers he may have used.

In Washington, U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno said on Wednesday that Mafiaboy must face punishment.

‘‘I think that it’s important first of all that we look at what we’ve seen and let young people know that they are not going to be able to get away with something like this scot-free," Reno told reporters on Capitol Hill. ‘‘There has got to be a remedy, there has got to be a penalty."

Reno said the U.S. government continued to work with industry on that incident and others, now that law enforcement has shown it can crack cyber-attack cases.

‘‘I believe this recent breakthrough demonstrates our capacity to track down those who would abuse this remarkable new technology, and track them down wherever they may be," she said.

In the February Web site assaults, attackers meticulously obtained remote control of computers around the world. They then used the computers to bombard the targeted Web sites, flooding them with so much data that legitimate users were temporarily denied access or service.

Police refused to provide any details that would identify Mafiaboy, or comment on speculation that he attends a suburban Montreal high school. The Mounties’ Inspector Roussel downplayed Mafiaboy’s computing hacking abilities, saying he likely did not have to devise any special programs to gain access to targeted computers.

‘‘It is our evaluation that Mafiaboy was not that good, actually. He had a good knowledge of computers, however, he was not what we could call a genius in that field," Roussel said.

William Lynn, an FBI agent who is assistant legal attache at the U.S. embassy in Ottawa, said investigators were not surprised to discover that Mafiaboy was a juvenile.

‘‘In our profiling of these types of matters it is common for us to consider this as a possibility," he told reporters. John Vranesevich, founder of the security Web site AntiOnline.com, said he believed the attack on CNN was a copycat attack, and that the action against other sites such as Yahoo, E-Bay and Amazon were carried out by someone older and more sophisticated.

‘‘MafiaBoy is ’an’ attacker, but he’s not ’the’ attacker," Vranesevich told Reuters in a interview, saying the CNN attack was very haphazard and unskillful. ‘‘He didn’t use any of the usual techniques to cover his tracks, in fact he bragged about it."

Jeffrey Johnson, chief executive of Meta Secure-com Solutions, an Atlanta-based electronic commerce security firm, said that in such Web attacks, hackers usually use several "zombie" computers to which they had already illegally gained remote control to flood the target site with incoming streams of nuisance data.

Johnson said Mafiaboy had been well known in the hacker underground and in a popular Internet chat room for about two years. Mafiaboy stood out from others because he often bragged in the online chat room about how he planned to take down a few Web sites.

‘‘He was looking for bragging rights. He was doing it to show that he has power," Johnson said.

Watch out! UtilityDog Unleashed

Probability One Technologies has released UtilityDog 1.0 for the Macintosh. UtilityDog is a multi-purpose file utility that provides a new way of interacting with the files and folders on your hard drive and auxiliary disks, according to MacTech Magazine.

The program provides a "find file" capability and can purportedly find files and folders by virtually any criteria imaginable. UtilityDog can even find duplicate files, enabling users to eliminate them and recover wasted disk space. Another feature of the utility is its ability to display the contents of most files and folders instantly in its "Contents View" area. Users can browse through disks or through the results of a "find file" search, viewing the contents of each item without opening additional applications.

UtilityDog also offers backup/restore capabilities. Users can choose between a simple "Synchronize Folders" operation and more complex solutions for backing up or restoring specific files and folders. You can learn more at http://www.ProbabilityOne.com.

Microsoft To Unveil New Pocket PC

Microsoft Corp. believes handheld organizers should do much more than organize, and the company and its partners are now betting millions on it.

The software giant and three computer manufacturers are set to announce a

new generation of handheld organizers on Wednesday that will not only keep appointments and organize phone numbers, but will play music, record sound, balance checkbooks and surf the Internet.

The Pocket PC represents Microsoft’s third try at building a successful handheld device, a market the company has invested millions of dollars in with disappointing results. This time, Microsoft believes it and its partners have a device that will give market leader Palm Computing Inc. a run for its money.

‘‘People joke that it takes Microsoft until version three to get something right," said Ben Waldman, Microsoft’s vice president in charge of mobile services. ‘‘Well, this is version three and we got it right."

In addition to a datebook, calendar, calculator and memo pad, the Pocket PC will include a slimmed-down but useable version of Internet Explorer, an e-book reader that uses ClearType technology to make it easy on the eyes, a digital voice recorder, and a Windows Media Player for music and video files.

With additional plug-in hardware, the various models - built by Compaq Computer Corp., Hewlett-Packard Co. and Casio Computer Co. - also will support wireless Internet connections and have additional memory storage.

Priced between $499 and $599, the Pocket PCs are at the high end of the market for handhelds that synchronize with personal computers, a concept first introduced by Palm in March 1996. The Palm IIIc, the first Palm organizer to include a color screen, sells for about $449.

‘‘We’re still a little high, but we give a little extra functionality," said Steve Ballmer, Microsoft’s president and chief executive. Ballmer said he is already using the product for notes, e-mail and a little bit of video golf between meetings. ‘‘I feel very good about where we are with this."

That feeling is a first for Microsoft’s handheld efforts. Previous versions of the handhelds, running on the Windows CE operating system, were slow, expensive and unpopular. The old screens looked like a miniaturized Windows 95 interface, complete with the same icons and ‘‘Start" button, and burned through battery power quickly.

On the new Pocket PCs, the interface looks more like Palm’s, complete with larger icons and fewer pull-down menus. Most functions are accessed with a single touch. Battery life has improved somewhat as well.

There are still some technical issues with the Pocket PC. Some Palm customers may have trouble transferring data from older Palm organizers to the new Pocket PCs.

Only one of the three computer makers has included software that allows Pocket PC owners to beam data, via infrared technology, between the Pocket PC and Palm Computing’s devices. And cheaper versions of the Pocket PC will barely have enough memory storage for all the on-board software.

However, even Palm’s premier models don’t feature the perks of the Pocket PC. For example, the only device that offers any kind of music player is Handspring Inc.’s Visor, built on the Palm operating system. The Visor, introduced last November, requires a plug-in module for its music player.

While the Palm IIIc offers a color screen, few other improvements were

made to the basic Palm software. The Palm VII, also $449, has a built-in wireless Internet connection, but only allows for limited access to a handful of Web sites.

Microsoft executives said the biggest plus for the Pocket PC is that it can run a number of programs simultaneously. For example, a user can listen to MP3 music files, play a video game and look up a phone number at the same time.

Palm Computing, recently spun off from 3Com Corp., has no public plans to substantially improve its hardware or software. That could be a serious problem as other hardware companies continue to meld personal organizers with digital music players, pagers and cellular phones.

‘‘Palm ought to be running scared," said Michael Gartenberg, a senior analyst with the Gartner Group. ‘‘They haven’t shown a clear path to include this kind of functionality."

Gartenberg noted a similarity to another Microsoft competitor: Apple Computer.

‘‘In the 1980s, Apple was the technology leader for a long time, then just stagnated and let Microsoft beat them," Gartenberg said. ‘‘The same could happen here."

’Whistler’ OS Sneaks On the Web -- Again

For the second time, a supersecret version of the upcoming Microsoft Windows operating system leaks out on the Internet.

Microsoft Corp.’s Whistler thief, it seems, has struck again.

Another version of the company’s follow-up operating system to Windows 2000, code-named Whistler, has been posted illegally to the Internet.

The OS, which is tentatively scheduled to debut in March 2001, is being developed inside the walls of Microsoft Corp. The company has been producing versions, or builds, of the OS that are supposed to be available only to Microsoft employees; the OS is not yet in public beta testing.

The first known copy of the OS, Build 2211.1, was posted to the Web about three weeks ago by an unknown person. However, it is likely it was a Microsoft employee who, in some capacity, first took the OS outside the company.

Microsoft officials said Monday that the company is aware of the latest Whistler leak, which is of Build 2223.

"Microsoft is looking into recent reports that another build has been posted to the Net," a Microsoft spokesman confirmed, although he offered no other details on the build or on actions taken to investigate how the OS found its way to the Web.

This latest version of Whistler appears to be legitimate, said Robert Stein, president of Active Network Inc., which owns Activewin.com, one of the Web sites that first reported Whistler’s appearance on the Web.

"I think it is probably the same person (who released Build 2211.1)," Stein said. However, "I don't think they've found them yet. Someone's just laughing at (Microsoft) right now, because it's probably not the last time it will happen."

It is not clear how the newer build made its way from Microsoft's protective clutches, although it is likely that the program was saved from a Microsoft server to a CD-ROM and then uploaded to the Web.

Whistler is the code name for the first full-fledged upgrade to Windows 2000 that will be based on the Windows NT kernel, rather than the Windows 9X kernel. (The Windows 9X update is code-named Millennium and expected to ship in the third or fourth quarter of this year.)

iCab Preview 2.0 Available

The German developer of iCab has posted a new preview version of the Mac Web browser. Preview 2.0, in addition to fixing bugs, improves the program's Hotlist (bookmarks) feature by letting you import and export bookmarks. Bookmarks imported from Internet Explorer or Netscape Navigator appear as folders in the Hotlist. Preview 2.0 also adds the ability to export the History and resume aborted downloads.

iCab said it has improved JavaScript support, but the feature remains unfinished. Full JavaScript support, and support for Cascading Style Sheets, are promised for the final release.

For Web developers, iCab generates HTML error reports and can automatically reload Web pages when edited in an authoring program. Other features include auto-completion of URLs, the ability to import Internet Explorer Web archives and the ability to bookmark frames outside the parent window.

One of iCab's hallmarks is its compact file size: the PowerPC version is a 1.1MB download, the 68K version 1MB. It requires a minimum 4MB of RAM. Versions are available in English, German and Japanese. The preview expires August 31, 2000.

Microsoft Unrepentant for Practices

The government next week will present its proposed penalties against Microsoft Corp. for violating federal antitrust law, but the giant software company remains unrepentant.

Company executives at a computer trade show here demonstrated Microsoft's Windows Millennium consumer operating system - due out later this year - which continues to closely tie in the Microsoft Internet Explorer browser that led to the company being branded a monopoly.

The new operating system, the sequel to the consumer-oriented Windows 98, also ties in software that allows consumers to download, store and share music, photos and videos off the Internet, posing a new challenge to the dominance of such companies as RealNetworks Inc.

But in the demonstration before an audience Tuesday at the spring Comdex

computer trade show, the digital media feature of Windows Me, as it has been dubbed, froze up and was not shown. Two years ago, Microsoft chairman Bill Gates was embarrassed at the same show when a demonstration of Windows 98 crashed.

Microsoft’s decision to bundle nonessential software into its operating systems is the issue at the center of an antitrust ruling against the company. U.S. District Judge Thomas Penfield Jackson ruled the company illegally tied its Web browser to the operating system to crush competitor Netscape Communications Corp.

Executives at the Redmond, Wash.-based company argue consumers and businesses want the ease-of-use provided by bundling software with its operating system, which runs tasks for most of the world’s personal computers.

‘‘Microsoft is continuing to make huge investments in our platform, in our technologies, to continue to bring forward the services and support we can provide ... as together we explore this new generation of computing," said Tod Nielsen, a vice president in Microsoft’s platform computing group.

Analysts say Microsoft’s strategy has been to proceed with business as usual, including bundling new media software that is becoming increasingly popular with consumers, with the hope that the antitrust ruling will be reversed on appeals that could go all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court.

‘‘I don’t know if what they’re doing is thumbing their noses at the government," said Tim Bajarin, president of Creative Strategies Inc., a Silicon Valley high-tech consulting firm. ‘‘If you take Microsoft’s initial position, by adding new features to Windows, that is part of the innovation process.

‘‘And what the consumer really cares about is simplicity. From a user standpoint, I’d rather all the components I need to do something be in one place."

The Justice Department and 19 states suing Microsoft have until April 28 to submit their proposed penalties. The company then would then have until May 10 to respond, and the government until May 17 to file its rebuttal.

Industry experts say that the remedial options likely to be considered by Jackson range from breaking up Microsoft to milder sanctions such as ordering the company to surrender its lucrative blueprint, the so-called source code, for its Windows operating software.

Virtual Newscaster To Make Debut

She has green hair, big eyes, slightly jerky movements and a vaguely American accent. She says she is ‘‘the face of the future."

Her developers hope she’s a gold mine.

Ananova - billed as the world’s first virtual newscaster - makes her debut Wednesday on the Internet. With a click of a mouse, computer users around the world can have breaking news bulletins read to them by the glamorous cyber-anchor, programmed to exude a range of human emotions.

Her creators promise that is just the beginning.

‘‘She’s a lot more than a talking head that reads the news," Mark Hird, publishing director at Ananova Ltd., said Tuesday in launching the creation to the media. ‘‘She’s a computer with a face in front of it, not a face with nothing much behind it. It’s a phenomenal information resource."

In addition to the virtual newscasts - which are delivered TV-style by a head-and-shoulders Ananova and come complete with a commercial break - users can arrange to receive tailored e-mail bulletins on subjects that interest them, from sports scores to stock alerts. Just as with a host of other Web sites, they also can browse entertainment listings, buy tickets and make use of Ananova’s dedicated search engine.

‘‘I’m your personal assistant in a digital world," the animated cyberanchor said from a video screen at the media launch.

Ananova was developed by Britain’s Press Association news agency, which has gone so far as to rename its new media division Ananova Ltd.

Ananova ‘‘will completely change the way we communicate," said Vivienne Adshead, the company’s commercial director.

Others were more muted in their assessment.

‘‘It’s quite a cute idea," said Rebecca Ulph, an analyst with Internet specialists Fletcher Research Ltd in London. ‘‘I think it will appeal to the younger end of the market and people who are new to the Internet, people who want a filtering mechanism through all the news that’s out there.

‘‘It’s a marketing idea, rather than anything really innovative or exciting," she added.

But several Internet watchers said they were unaware of anything else like it in cyberspace.

‘‘It’s tempting to say it’s a gimmick, but I think it sounds like a very good idea," said Cliff Douse, editor of British-based Internet Advisor magazine.

Ananova has a definite glamour factor: She bears more than a passing resemblance to Posh Spice, a.k.a. Victoria Beckham, and several designers reportedly have expressed interest in fashioning her wardrobe. But her creators dismissed claims that she’s just another cyber-babe along the lines of Internet icon Lara Croft, buxom heroine of the video game Tomb Raider.

‘‘We did some tests and in general people said they preferred to get their information from a woman," Adshead said. ‘‘She’s been designed to appeal, though, to both men and women. She’s not a babe. She’s a sophisticated real-time computer system."

She’s also, her developers hope, a nice little earner who will generate revenue through various e-commerce partnerships and ‘‘commercially confidential" projects.

The company will not reveal how much their anchor cost to develop or how

much they hope to bring in when Ananova Ltd. is sold in the next few months, though a sale figure of $400 million has been reported. Robert Simpson, Ananova's chief executive officer, said the firm is talking with bidders and expects to announce a sale in the next month or two.

Virtual Newscaster Makes Debut

Her first words were ''Hello, world. Here is the news - and this time it's personal."

Ananova, billed as the world's first virtual newscaster, made her debut on the Internet today, reading a bulletin about a plane crash in the Philippines.

Her British creators say the computer-generated figure - with green hair, big eyes, slightly jerky movements and vaguely American accent - will revolutionize the way the world gets its news.

Ananova ''will completely change the way we communicate," said Vivienne Adshead, commercial director of Ananova Ltd.

The company said today's launch went smoothly and that the Web site attracted ''tens of thousands" of hits in the first hour.

From now on, with a click of a mouse, computer users around the world can have bulletins of breaking news read to them by the glamorous cyber-anchor, programmed to exude a range of human emotions.

In addition to the virtual newscasts, users can arrange to receive tailored e-mail bulletins on subjects that interest them, from sports scores to stock alerts. Just as with a host of other Web sites, they also can browse entertainment listings, buy tickets and make use of Ananova's dedicated search engine.

Soon, Ananova's services also will be available on the new generation of mobile telephones.

Ananova was developed by Britain's Press Association news agency, which has gone so far as to rename its new media division Ananova Ltd.

The company will not reveal how much it cost to develop or how much they hope to fetch when Ananova Ltd. is sold in the next few months - though a sale figure of $400 million has been reported.

Robert Simpson, Ananova's chief executive officer, said the firm was talking with bidders and expected to announce a sale in the next month or two.

Some observers were muted in their assessment of the idea of ''revolutionary" new news anchor.

''I think it will appeal to the younger end of the market and people who are new to the Internet, people who want a filtering mechanism through all the news that's out there," said Rebecca Ulph, an analyst with Internet specialists Fletcher Research Ltd in London. ''But if I wanted a newsreader, I'd turn on the television."

Internet Group to Create New Domain Names

The Internet’s top governing body took a small step toward creating more cyberspace by adding new domains to the ones connoted by the ubiquitous ".com," ".net" and ".org" suffixes.

A committee of the Internet Corp. for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) recommended to the group’s board of directors that a policy governing the creation of such categories, called "generic top level domain names" be created in an effort to better categorize Web sites and make them easier to find.

ICANN is the nonprofit company responsible for maintaining the infrastructure for Internet addresses.

Support for the expansion of top-level domains was not unanimous. Some companies complained that, with the introduction of new domains comes new vulnerability for trademark infringement.

The committee proposed to introduce such domains gradually with an eye on minimizing ‘‘cybersquatting," the unauthorized use of brand names in Web addresses.

Web domain registrars, not surprisingly, lauded the move saying it not only expanded the market for companies like themselves, but would make it easier to navigate through the Web.

Web domain name registrar Network Solutions Inc. voiced support for the expansion on Wednesday, saying it backed the creation of such names, suggesting the adoption of ‘‘.shop" and ‘‘.banc."

‘‘Opening the name space and creating new competition among top-level domains will offer consumers more choices and, we believe, lead to wider use of the Internet," Jim Rutt, chief executive officer of Network Solutions, said in a statement.

‘‘By making use of the legal and policy infrastructure that already supports .com, .net and .org, the Internet community can rapidly advance this most important task at minimal costs," he said.

Network Solutions, which currently dominates about 80 percent of the Internet domain name registration market, said the ‘‘.shop" domain would be open to anyone wishing to register a site, similar to the ‘‘.com" domain.

It proposed that the registry for ‘‘.shop" could be a cooperative structure made up of any ICANN-accredited registrar who wishes to participate with no single registrar exercising control over the registry.

The ‘‘.banc" domain would be limited to those in the banking industry, similar to the way that the ‘‘.edu" domain is limited to educational institutions, Network Solutions said. The registry would be controlled by nonprofit interests associated with the worldwide banking industry, according to Network Solution’s proposal.

‘‘We’re excited," said Richard Forman, chief executive of Register.com, one of Network Solution’s competitors. "It represents an opportunity to

grow the whole market for domain names and a great opportunity for us."

ICANN was chosen by the government to oversee the name-and-address system. Previously, Network Solutions had been contesting ICANN'S authority and asserting ownership over the database of previously assigned Internet names.

In return for backing down, Network Solutions is allowed to continue managing the database of Internet names and corresponding numerical addresses for another four years.

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